

Community Calendar

THURSDAY, FEB 26

OC Democratic Women

— The Orange County Democratic Women will hold its monthly meeting with guest speaker Moses Carey, head of the Employment Security Commission. 7:30-9pm, OWASA Community Room, 400 Jones Ferry Road. l_foxworth_2000@yahoo.com, 942-0045

FRIDAY, FEB 27

Bluegrass Conversation

— Bluegrass musician Tim O'Brien will speak about his music and career. 10am, Hanes Art Center Auditorium, UNC campus. Free and open to the public. smweiss@email.unc.edu, 962-1345

SATURDAY, FEB 28

NAACP Meeting— The Northern Orange NAACP will hold its annual retreat and monthly meeting. 10am, Lattisville Grove Baptist Church, 1701 Jimmy Ed Road, Hurdle Mills. 732-5708 or 304-5835



Mardi Gras — The Second Annual Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball is sponsored by ChathamArts and the Abundance Foundation. 7pm-midnight, Chatham Mills, 480 Hillsboro St., Pittsboro. \$30 in advance, \$35 at the door: www.chathamarts.org, 542-0394

Wine and Cheese — The Hillsborough Wine Company will host a free cheese and wine tasting featuring local cheeses. 1-5pm, 118 S. Churton St., Hillsborough. 732-4343

Casablanca — Century Center Cinema presents the 1942 film with free popcorn and soda. 7pm, Carrboro Century Center. \$4

Computer Class — A free class in Introduction to Microsoft Powerpoint. Class size limited to 4. 9-10am, Carrboro Branch Library at McDougle School. 969-3006 or www.lib.unc.edu/cws to register

Creativity Workshop — “Spring Forward,” a workshop in writing and color, will help participants awaken their creativity. 1:30-4:30pm, Chapel Hill Friends Meeting Schoolhouse. \$10 suggested donation for materials. 967-4746 or 942-2112 to register

5K Race — The Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority at UNC will host a 5K race benefiting Friends for an Earlier Breast Cancer Test. 8am, the Old Well on Cameron Avenue. \$20 day of the race, \$15 in advance. www.tarheeltrout.com/index.html

SUNDAY, MARCH 1

Community Dinner — Community-building event with sustainable food provided by local restaurants. 1-3pm, McDougle School Cafetorium. \$8 adults, \$3 children under 10. www.communitydinner.org

Baby-Wearing Class — Learn how to wear your baby in the carrier of your choice. 12-1pm, The Red Hen, 201 W. Weaver St. Free. 942-4420, theredhen@gmail.com

Dangerous Ideas — Randy Best, leader of the North Carolina Ethical Society, will discuss how beliefs motivate us to act and what makes ideas good or bad. 1:30pm, Extraordinary Ventures, 200 S. Elliott Road. Free

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4

Travel Workshop — The Hosting International-North Carolina Council will offer a workshop on “World Travel 101” for college-age students and adults planning trips. 7:15pm, Chapel Hill Public Library. hostinginternationalnorthcarolina.org/News.aspx

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

Holocaust Talk — Author Susan Block will lead a discussion on Van Eeden, a North Carolina agricultural settlement established in 1939 for Jews fleeing Nazi Germany. 5pm reception and exhibit viewing, North Carolina Collection Gallery,

Wilson Library second floor. 5:45pm program, Pleasants Family Assembly Room, Wilson Library, UNC campus. Free. 962-4207, liza-terll@unc.edu

FRIDAY, MARCH 6

NC Live Class — Learn about the many uses of NC Live, a collection of online resources freely available to library patrons. 12:30pm, Carrboro Creative Coworking, 205 Lloyd St., Suite 101. 918-7387, cybrary@co.orange.nc.us, www.co.orange.nc.us/library/cybrary

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

Snow Hill Hike — Naturalist Ken Moore and Triangle Land Conservancy’s Bo Howes will lead a tour of the historic Snow Hill region of Durham County. 10am. For directions or to register, visit www.triangleland.org/news/calendar/calendar.shtml

Coffee and Wine Tasting — Coffee Cupping and Wine Tasting with Cup-A-Joe. 1-5pm, Hillsborough Wine Company, 118 S. Churton St., Hillsborough. Free. 732-4343

Ongoing



Cancer Support — Weekly support free of charge for cancer patients and family at Cornucopia House. cornucopiahouse.org

The Compassionate Friends

— Third Mondays, 7-8:30pm. Self-help support after the death of a child. Free and open to all adults grieving the loss of a child or sibling. Evergreen United Methodist Church. 967-3221, chapelhilltcf.org

DivorceCare — Mondays, 7pm. A support group for those separated or divorced. Orange United Methodist Church, 942-2825, connect2orange.org

Computer Class — Chapel Hill SeniorNet is offering a class in Spreadsheet Fundamentals. 9-11am Tuesdays and Thursdays until March 19, Seymour Senior Center: 968-2070 to register

Kids

Pajama Story Time — Feb. 20, 7pm. Market Street Books, 510 Market St., Southern Village. 933-5111

Toddler Time — Thursdays, 4pm, Carrboro Branch Library. 969-3006

Preschool Story Time — Saturdays, 10:30am. Carrboro Branch Library, 969-3006

Story Time — Thursdays, 10:30am. Market Street Books. All ages welcomed. 933-5111

Express Yourself! — Saturdays, 10:45-11:15am, 11:30am-noon. Art program for ages 3-8 & their caregivers. Kidzu Children’s Museum, 105 E. Franklin St. \$2, 933-1455, kidzuchildremsmuseum.org

Volunteers

RSVP 55+ Volunteer Program — Seeks volunteers at least 55 years of age and over who would like assistance in finding an opportunity that matches their interests. RSVP places volunteers with more than 100 nonprofit agencies in Orange County. 968-2056, co.orange.nc.us/aging/RSVPindex.asp

Meals on Wheels — Seeks volunteers to deliver meals and/or bake simple desserts for recipients in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro area. 942-2948

Hospice — Training for those interested in being UNC Hospice volunteers, Fridays from Feb. 13-Mar. 20, 9am-12pm. UNC Health Care/Hospice Office, 1101 Weaver Dairy Road, Chapel Hill. To register, contact Mary Honeycutt, 542-5545 or mhoneycutt@unch.unc.edu

Carr Mill Mall break-ins

CARRBORO — Carrboro police are investigating several break-ins that occurred in Carr Mill Mall late Saturday night.

According to police, the suspect entered the mall through a door to Panzanella, then continued through the mall, where he broke into several businesses, including Mulberry Silks, Sofia’s, Rita’s Italian Ice and the Woodland Shop. Police are still determining exactly how much was stolen from the businesses, but found \$310.77 in a bag recovered at the scene.

The suspect is described as a black male, 25 to 35 years old, between five feet four inches and five feet seven inches tall and of medium build. He was last seen wearing

a heavy jacket and jeans traveling south from the mall on foot.

Carrboro Police Captain J.G. Booker said the manner in which the crime was committed matches suspects the police department has dealt with before, but that police had not yet arrested anyone in connection with the incident.

“You know in a downtown business district that businesses are going to be broken into at some point,” Booker said.

Police were notified that a suspect had entered the mall by an Elmo’s employee who spotted the suspect.

Booker encouraged residents to notify police if they see any suspicious activity surrounding businesses.

— SUSAN DICKSON

Crowd protests taxes

HILLSBOROUGH — It’s uncertain how many people turned out Monday night at the Red Barn at Daniel Boone Village in Hillsborough for the Orange County Tax Revolt meeting. The line snaked around the barn and event organizers said they stopped counting the number of people both inside and out after hitting the 1,300 mark.

As it happens, the maximum the building is supposed to hold is 300. With 400 to 500 already stuffed inside, the Hillsborough Fire Marshal’s Office began turning folks away.

Carrboro resident Bryan Berger, who started the movement with a sign in his front yard, was certainly pleased with the turnout, but disappointed more couldn’t enter.

“I am just tickled pink to see so many people here,” Berger said, “and it just breaks my heart that we had to turn away hundreds of people who couldn’t get in the building.”

The event was sponsored and staffed by members of Freedom Works, a national small-government, anti-tax movement chaired by former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey – and those who did make it in the door heard former Hillsborough Mayor Joe Phelps give advice on appealing their tax assessments and former Orange County Com-

missioner Ben Lloyd blame local governments for high property tax burdens, a lack of economic development and wasteful spending.

The crowd of mostly older residents warmed up to the message with applause and shouts of “Amen!”

Gerald Talbert owns two gas stations in Orange County and came to the meeting because he’s frustrated with the taxes he’s paying.

“I’ve been angry for years,” Talbert said, “because it keeps going up and up and up. I don’t have anything to show for it.”

With the bad economy hurting his convenience store sales, and falling gas prices adding to his problems, Talbert said he will have to start setting aside money to pay his property taxes in July this year instead of September.

Jane Hatley came from her home in the southern part of the county to find out how to appeal her tax revaluations. She’s been retired from UNC Hospitals since 1993 and lives on a fixed income.

“We have to do something for my grandchildren and their children,” Hatley said.

The next meeting is set for March 16; but because of the large turnout on Monday night, organizers haven’t yet decided on a location.

— RICH FOWLER

Do you have anything for one of our calendars? Send your submissions to calendar@carrborocitizen.com

REVALUATIONS

FROM PAGE 1

Mostly accurate

The Orange County Tax Assessor’s office reviewed values on 53,000 properties countywide; 19,591 were residential parcels in 290 neighborhoods. One-hundred-forty-three neighborhoods consisting of 10,517 properties saw revaluations in excess of the 22 percent county average. Another 147 neighborhoods consisting of 8,782 properties were revalued below the county average.

Zimmerman and some of his colleagues have been doing comparative market analyses for homeowners who think their re-

assessments were inaccurate.

“For people in established neighborhoods, we’re not seeing that the reassessment numbers are off an awful lot,” he said. But there are some exceptions. “Where there’s better information, they’re getting closer; and where there’s less information, there can be some pretty wide swings,” he said.

Orange County property owners have until March 31 to appeal their revaluations. So far, the assessor’s office has received more than 1,500 requests for review.

‘Get ready to move’

Thirty years ago, Tom Rose and his wife built a house on Lakeshore Drive in Chapel Hill for less than \$300,000. In Janu-

ary, the retired couple discovered the tax value on their home had gone up from just under \$698,000 in 2005 to \$1,107,000 in 2009 — a 58 percent increase. Rose says that the value of the house only went up 20 percent, but the value of the land it sits on — two-thirds of an acre on Eastwood Lake — doubled from \$300,000 to \$600,000.

Rose has already appealed his revaluation. “We’re not contesting so much the increase of the value of the house so much, but we’re going to the mat over the land. I am planning right now on going to the next step. And if that doesn’t work out, I’m going to take it to Raleigh.”

And if he loses his appeal? “My realtor said, ‘Get ready,

Tom, for something around \$25,000 in taxes.’ I’m paying \$13,500 now. So I said to my wife, ‘Get ready to move.’ We can’t live under those circumstances,” Rose said. “I’m not saying the house didn’t increase [in value], and that’s wonderful. But I don’t have the income. I’m serious when I say I’ll have to see what my tax bill looks like; and if it’s more than I can handle, which is what I suspect it might be, I will have to move, and I will move out of this county.”

Business impact

Pons was surprised by the increased valuations at his two Chapel Hill locations on West Franklin Street and University Mall (a third location is in Carrboro).

“The Franklin Street service center, which is an unimproved property, went up 84 percent. That’s like \$70 per square foot of land,” Pons said. “The East Franklin location went up 49 percent.” He’s appealing the revaluations.

He guesses the West Franklin increase was based on one high-profile transaction.

“There was one sale for \$70 per square foot in the area — it was Spencer Young [owner of the Courtyard] when he was try-

ing to find a parking lot. It was a desperate buy and now they’re in foreclosure,” Pons noted. “We’re not going to go out of business, but it certainly hurts.”

Julie Jennings owns Uniquities, a women’s clothing store also on West Franklin Street, and the building it’s located in. Its tax value was \$263,700 in 2004. When reassessed in 2005, the value shot up to \$480,000, an 82 percent increase. This year, the new tax value is \$708,800, a 47 percent increase. Making matters worse, the assessed value of Jennings’ home went up around 50 percent too. She plans to challenge both.

Like Pons, she said the increased value won’t put her out of business, but it does put her in a squeeze.

“People are spending less money locally. It’s going to be

challenging,” she said.

To soothe the sting of higher valuations in a down economy, County Commissioner Mike Nelson advocates a reduction in the property tax rate.

“Lowering the tax rate to be ‘revenue neutral’ is standard operating procedure for local governments,” said Nelson. “Local elected officials need to stick to our promise to adopt a lower, revenue-neutral tax rate.”

“It’s a little early to say for sure exactly what the new tax rate will be, but the county’s current tax rate is just over 99 cents. A revenue-neutral rate might be, say, 87 cents. Lowering the tax rate will be good for our citizens.”

Editor’s note: The Citizen will follow the property owners in this article to see how their appeals come out.

Appealing your revaluation

Think your revaluation is out of whack? Here’s how to appeal it. “If you just go in with ‘I think you’re wrong,’ you’re not going to get anywhere with them,” said Mark Zimmerman, owner of Re/Max Winning Edge in Chapel Hill. Bring as much data to prove your point as possible.

Download the Valuation Input and Review Form (available at www.co.orange.nc.us/assessor/taxvalfm.pdf). Gathering the necessary data isn’t hard, but it does require time, which is why some property owners have engaged real estate pros to help. Acceptable data includes comparables gathered from the Multiple Listing Service or even ads in the newspaper. You can also cite property tax values from neighboring parcels (available at http://gis.co.orange.nc.us/land/search.asp). Some people are going as far as shelling out \$300 to \$400 for an official appraisal, the “gold standard” of proof in an appeal.

“This is the first year we’ve ever had on the website the ability to search by address, so you can pull up a street, look up every valuation on that street, boom, just like that,” said Orange County Tax Assessor John Smith said. “People are taking advantage of that. The better the information we get, the better the revaluation is going to be in the end, and the more likelihood of an adjustment.”

Residents who are successful in their requests will receive a notice of revaluation in mid- to late April.

If property owners still aren’t satisfied, they will have 30 days to appeal to the Orange County Board of Equalization and Review, a three-member panel that hears each revaluation appeal. Residents also can appeal to the North Carolina Property Tax Commission in Raleigh, the last step they have before going to court.

Other resources

There are other forms of relief available to elderly, disabled and some agricultural property owners. For more information on eligibility requirements, visit www.co.orange.nc.us/assessor/exemption.asp or call 245-2100.

Neighborhood Impact

Source: Orange County Tax Assessor

290 neighborhoods consisting of 19,591 residential properties
143 neighborhoods consisting of 10,517 properties had revaluations in excess of the county average of 22 percent.
147 neighborhoods consisting of 8,782 properties had revaluations below the county average.

Neighborhoods with highest increases

Percentage increase from 2005	Neighborhood	# of Properties	Location
46.77%	White Oak Condos	95	Carrboro; Fidelity St. off of Main St.
44.04%	Stateside	43	Chapel Hill; off MLK near Timberlyne
43.60%	Rangewood	73	Carrboro; off N.C. 54 near Poplar Ave.
42.86%	Homestead Village	62	Chapel Hill; off Homestead Road near Chapel Hill High
41.85%	Camelot Village Condos	109	Chapel Hill; S. Estes Dr. Across from University Mall

Neighborhoods with lowest increases

Percentage increase from 2005	Neighborhood	# of Properties	Location
1.50%	Braddock Park	30	Hillsborough; U.S. 70 at Scotswood Blvd.
1.27%	Governor’s Grove	34	Cedar Grove
0.99%	Northern Heights	41	Hillsborough; off U.S. 70 at Rainey Ave.
-0.01%	North Dixie	68	Hillsborough; off U.S. 70 at Rainey Ave.
-2.92%	La Mesa	70	Timberlake; off N.C. 57 at Bacon Road